

## **GRADUATION RATE SURVEY (GRS-2A) PRETEST QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

### **General Questions:**

**Question:** My institution has programs that operate on both a term basis and a clock hour (continuing enrollment) basis. How do I choose my cohort?

**Answer:** If most programs operate on a term basis, use a fall entering cohort; otherwise you should use a full-year cohort. You must report completers according to the program they completed and calculate 150% based on the length of that program. For example, regardless of full year versus fall cohort, a completer of a 2-year (6 quarters) program must complete within 8 quarters; while the student completing a 450 hour (15 week) manicuring program must complete in 23 weeks. When using a full-year cohort, the 150% time frames begin at the student's respective start date.

**Question:** My school has mostly 3-year programs. According to the Student Right-to-Know (SRK) regulations, I need not disclose graduation rates until 4½ years after the start of my fall 1996 cohort. Do I still need to respond to the IPEDS GRS?

**Answer:** Yes. IPEDS is mandated by a different law and must be completed by institutions that have participation agreements with the Department of Education for Federal student financial assistance.

You should report GRS data to IPEDS. The GRS will request data on your initial cohort (1994) after 3 years and after 6 years. If your graduation rate data calculated after 4½ years is very different from the 3-year rate you report to IPEDS, you would probably want to disclose the 4½-year rate as well as the 3-year rate. You may also wish to report the 4½-year rate to the Secretary; however, this is not necessary.

**Question:** My institution offers an associate's degree, but we do not have any information on a 1994 cohort. Do I have to do anything this year?

**Answer:** Yes. Although SRK requires you to begin collecting data on a 1996 cohort, IPEDS GRS is requesting data on a 1994 cohort. If data on 1994 are not available, then you are to report as much information as possible for the earliest cohort for which data are available.

**Question:** Why is the cohort year defined as July 1 through June 30? Can I redefine it as September 1 through August 31 and report my status as of August 31?

**Answer:** No you cannot redefine the cohort year. The SRK regulations specify the dates and the IPEDS GRS reflects the same dates in order to stay in compliance with the regulations. The July 1 through June 30 dates are also the same as those specified in your IPEDS Completions survey, so you should be used to reporting for this time period. If, by excluding the summer graduates, your "graduation rate" is considerably different, you should consider **disclosing** both rates. Just make sure that each is clearly defined in your disclosure statement.

**Question:** When can I "adjust" my cohort?

**Answer:** For purposes of this survey, NCES recommends that you wait until you are ready to calculate your SRK graduation/completion and transfer-out rates. The worksheet provides a place to subtract out the exclusions/adjustments from the cohort to establish a number for your denominator.

**Question:** Do I need to track students every term?

**Answer:** No, you can set up your system to identify your cohort upon entry and then, at the end of 150% of normal time for the longest program, look back to see what happened to those in the cohort. You will need to know when they completed, but it is not necessary to compare or track from term-to-term.

### **Cohort Questions:**

**Question:** What is a "first-time" student?

**Answer:** According to the IPEDS *Glossary*, a first-time student is "*A student attending any institution for the first time at the level enrolled.*" By this we mean at the undergraduate level, graduate level, or first-professional level. Since the GRS is only interested in undergraduates, it means that the student is first time in postsecondary education (or the student is not known to have attended another postsecondary institution). There are two exceptions: (1) students who attended any institution the summer prior to entering your institution in the fall term are to be counted as "first-time", as are (2) students who entered with advanced standing (college credits earned before graduation from high school).

**Question:** How do I count a student who started in my original cohort, transferred to another institution (for which I have a confirmation of transfer), and then returned to my institution?

**Answer:** You have two options:

(1) with the confirmation of transfer, you may count them as a transfer out and include them in your transfer-out rate; OR

(2) you may consider them according to their current status at your institution (either having completed a program or still enrolled in a program).

The first option will help your transfer-out rate; the second option will only help you if the student completed the program within 150% of normal time. YOU MAY NOT COUNT THE STUDENT TWICE (as a transfer-out student and as a completer).

**Question:** Where do I place transfers into my institution?

**Answer:** The IPEDS GRS does NOT collect information on transfers in. THESE STUDENTS SHOULD NOT BE INCLUDED IN ANY COHORT.

**Question:** How do I report students who are taking ESL (English as a Second Language) or developmental courses?

**Answer:** These students are not included in the cohort if their courses are not part of a program of study that leads to a degree, diploma, certificate, or other formal award and if they are not eligible for Title IV Federal financial aid.

**Question:** Are students in remedial courses included in the cohort?

**Answer:** Use the same reasoning here that you use to determine who to report as degree seeking on your IPEDS Fall Enrollment report. If they are degree seeking for purposes of qualifying for student financial aid, then they must be included in the cohort.

**Question:** What about non-credit enrollment, or students taking CEU's?

**Answer:** Neither should be included in your cohort.

**Question:** Are non-degree seekers included?

**Answer:** Even though these students are enrolled for credit, if they are not seeking a degree, they are not to be included in your cohort according to the SRK regulations.

**Question:** How do I treat new entrants that get credit for life experience?

**Answer:** If the student has never enrolled in a postsecondary institution, they are to be counted as “first-time”.

**Question:** Do I count students that have acquired credits through distance learning or correspondence as “first-time”?

**Answer:** Since these students must have been enrolled in an institution in order to obtain credit through correspondence or distance learning, they are not “first-time”.

**Question:** If a student was in remedial courses last year and applies as a full-time degree-seeking student this fall, can I count the student as "first-time"?

**Answer:** No. The student does not qualify as "first-time" because they are known to have previously attended a postsecondary institution (your's or another school) even though they enter with no credit.

**Question:** Many of our students take courses during the summer at other schools; should these be considered transfers out?

**Answer:** No. Keep the students in your cohort since they returned in the fall and continued in their programs of study.

**Question:** My initial cohort includes all full-time, first-time degree-seeking undergraduates enrolled as of October 15 - the same as on my IPEDS Fall Enrollment survey. Now what happens to: stop outs, drop outs, students who enroll part time next semester, students who switch to another program?

**Answer:** It looks like your cohort is defined correctly. Remember YOUR COHORT NEVER CHANGES. Students who stop out or drop out do not change the line 01 cohort number. They remain in the count and either return and complete (possibly within 150%), return but are still enrolled at the time you report their status, or they fall into the "other students not graduated and not enrolled" category.

Students who switch to part time or to another program are not given extra time to complete, nor are they removed from the cohort. Report their status as requested.

**Question:** If a student in my cohort obtains two undergraduate level degrees/awards (certificate in cosmetology and an AA) within the 3-year period can I count both completions?

**Answer:** No, you may only count one. NCES recommends that you report the highest degree obtained, but it is your decision as to which one you prefer to report.

**Transfer-out Questions:**

**Question:** If I get a request for transcript, can I use that as verification of transfer for a student in the cohort?

**Answer:** No, a request for transcript is not sufficient; however, should some follow up to the request for transcript indicate that the student has enrolled in another institution (e.g., confirmation from the receiving institution or postcard follow up with the student), that would be sufficient.

**Question:** In our school, we contact students who have not re-enrolled the next semester and/or conduct exit interviews. The exit interview is done in person; the contact is done by telephone or through a postcard survey. Some students indicate to us that they are currently enrolled in another institution. Can we consider these students as verified "transfers out"?

**Answer:** If you have written confirmation from a student as on the postcard survey or a note is made to the file during the exit interview or telephone call that **the student is attending another institution and the 150% of normal time has not elapsed**, then under the circumstances described above, you should consider these students as verified transfers out. However, if you only contact a sample of the students who have left, **YOU MAY NOT EXTRAPOLATE THE DATA ON CONFIRMED TRANSFERS TO THE ENTIRE NUMBER OF LEAVERS.**

**Question:** My school does not track transfers out and our limited budget does not allow us to set up a system to do this. Am I still in compliance with the requirements of SRK and am I still responsive to the GRS if I don't report transfers out?

**Answer:** Yes. You are to report any transfers for which you have verification, but there is no requirement to set up expensive systems to track transfer students.

## **Questions on Normal Time and Calculation of 150% of Normal Time**

**Question:** How do I calculate 150% of normal time to completion?

**Answer:** In order to calculate this, we first must define "normal time to completion". IPEDS has adopted the definition developed by The Joint Commission on Accountability Reporting (CAR) as a definition of normal time. Normal time is defined as "the time necessary for a student to complete all requirements for a degree or certificate according to an institution's catalog. This is typically 4 years (8 semesters or trimesters, or 12 quarters, excluding summer terms) for a bachelor's degree, 2 years (4 semesters or trimesters, or 6 quarters, excluding summer terms) for an associate's degree, and the scheduled times for certificate programs." Let's look at some examples:

Many associate's degree programs are outlined as 2-year programs - or 4 semesters - usually fall and spring. Extending this to 150% ( $1.5 \times 4$ ) would take 6 semesters or **through the end of the spring term of the third year.**

Similarly, an associate's degree that is advertised as a 2-year program - 6 quarters (fall, winter, spring, with no scheduled summer quarter), would extend to ( $1.5 \times 6$ ) or 9 quarters, **through the end of the spring quarter of the third year.**

Using the first example, it is important to note that the calculation is **NOT**  $2 \times 1.5$  equals 3 years after fall entrance, which extends through August of the third year. Certificate programs must be handled in much the same way. If a 900 contact hour course is advertised as taking 30 weeks to complete, the calculation of  $1.5 \times 30$  equals 45 weeks after the start date. If the student completes within that 45-week period, they are within 150% of normal time.

**Question:** How do I calculate 150% for students who stop out, or drop out, and then return and complete the program?

**Answer:** There is no difference in the calculation. The 150% of normal time is applied to the start date and is the same regardless of stop-out time. Some students may stop out for a term or two and still complete within 150% of normal time.

**Question:** I am currently calculating graduation rates but I include those students who complete during the summer following the sixth semester or third spring. Can I continue to report this way for the GRS?

**Answer:** No, you should follow the directions and report the status of the students as of June 30. You may, however, disclose both rates to your current and prospective students if you feel there is considerable difference in the rates.

### **Questions on Students with Athletically-Related Aid**

**Question:** What do I do with students that receive athletically-related student aid to play more than one sport?

**Answer:** IPEDS has adopted the hierarchy established by the NCAA for reporting these students, which is as follows: football, basketball, baseball, track/cross country, and finally all other sports combined. Please be sure to count each student athlete only once.

**Question:** If a student enrolls with the promise of athletic aid the second semester (provided they maintain good grades the first semester) should they be included in my cohort of students receiving athletic aid? What if they receive athletically-related student aid the second semester?

**Answer:** These students should not be part of the cohort of students receiving athletically-related student aid for purposes of calculating graduation rates. For our purposes, the student must **enter** with athletic aid.

### **Other Questions:**

**Question:** The number of students that could be considered for the adjustment to cohort (in the clarifying questions) is very small in my school. Do I need to try to track these "leavers"?

**Answer:** No. The allowable exclusions are provided for those institutions that may have a significant number of students that require longer to (or cannot) complete their programs for the reasons stated.

**Question:** What is a "transfer-preparatory program"?

**Answer:** This term is defined in 34 CFR Student Assistance General Provisions, Section 668.8(b)(1)(ii) as "the successful completion of at least a 2- year program that is acceptable for full credit toward a bachelor's degree and qualifies a student for admission into the third year of a bachelor's degree program." The Secretary considers this the equivalent of an associate's

degree.

**Question:** There is a provision for excluding students who leave the institution to join the Armed Services. Is there a similar provision for excluding students who are already in the military but are transferred to another duty station?

**Answer:** No, there is no such provision.

**Question:** My institution is a 2-year school. What are the shaded portions of the form for that look at my cohort after 6 years?

**Answer:** During the comment period provided following publication of the proposed regulations and at several association meetings, representatives from both the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE) were told that community colleges and other 2-year institutions had very different missions and students rarely completed their programs in 3 years. NCES therefore agreed to extend the "tracking period" so that 2-year schools could look at their cohorts at two points in time: first at 150% of normal time (or 3-years out) for SRK purposes; and again at 6 years out in order to provide a better picture of the role of the community college. Public 2-year institutions are also asked to track a part-time cohort since much of their enrollments are part time.

**Question:** If 2-year institutions are reporting both 3-years and 6-years out, what cohorts are being reported in the next few years?

**Answer:** Two-year institutions will report as follows:

In 1997 - cohort year 1994 (3-years out)

In 1998 - cohort year 1995 (3-years out)

In 1999 - cohort year 1996 (3-years out)

In 2000 - cohort year 1997 (3-years out) **and** 1994 (6-years out)

In 2001 - cohort year 1998 (3-years out) and 1995 (6-years out)...

**Question:** If I use a 1995 cohort this year, how does that work for future years?

**Answer:** You should refer to the response in the previous question. As you can see, by using the 1995 cohort (the earliest for which data are available) to report in 1997, you would then report on that same cohort in 1998 at which time, 150% is reached. In 1999, you would report on the 1996 cohort; in 2000, you would report only on the 1997 cohort since 1994 was not available, and in 2001, you would be on track with a final report on the 1995 cohort and the initial report on the 1998 cohort.





**Question:** My school enrolls students on a monthly basis so we will be using a full year cohort. If my longest program is 9 months, how do I calculate 150% of normal time and which cohort do I use?

**Answer:** Let's look at this one step at a time. First, schools with programs of less than 4 years are to report on a 1994 cohort; therefore, you should look at those students who entered your institution between July 1, 1994 and June 30, 1995. Next: The latest enrollment date would be June 1, 1995 and 150% of 9 months following this date would extend to July 15, 1996 (13½ months later). In order to complete the IPEDS GRS, the first status date following this is June 30, 1997 and the report is due January 2, 1998, so you will be on track for reporting your initial cohort.

**Question:** Will the GRS satisfy all my requirements for SRK?

**Answer:** NO! NO! and NO! The GRS provides institutions with instructions, definitions, and a format for calculating graduation rates and transfer-out rates. It also provides institutions with a methodology so that there is some consistency in the way the rates are calculated.

SRK requires disclosure of these rates to students and prospective students. By completing the GRS, you now have the rates you need to disclose. But you need to make them available.

For schools that offer athletically-related student aid, there are additional disclosure requirements and some reporting requirements. The GRS satisfies the reporting requirements only.

**Question:** Exactly what must be disclosed in order to be in compliance with SRK?

**Answer:** The regulations state that "Beginning with the group of students who enter the institution between July 1, 1996 and June 30, 1997, an institution shall disclose its completion or graduation rate and transfer-out rate information no later than the January 1 immediately following the point in time that 150% of the normal time for completion or graduation has elapsed for all of the students in the groups on which the institution bases its completion or graduation rate and transfer-out rate calculations. Therefore, at a minimum, you must disclose (January 1) your graduation and transfer-out rates (as of June 30 of the prior year). The Secretary urges institutions to disclose as much additional information as warranted to help consumers understand institutional mission, etc. Thus you should consider additional rates as well, such as rates for part-time students; rates through the end of the summer term following 150% of normal time; and possibly rates 8 or 10 years out if your students take longer to complete.